

## Community resources

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*courage is contagious*

## Viewing cable 09DHAHRAN266, EASTERN PROVINCE SHIA FRUSTRATED

If you are new to these pages, please read an introduction on the [structure of a cable](#) as well as how to [discuss them](#) with others. See also the [FAQs](#)

### Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cable's unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

### Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#09DHAHRAN266**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09DHAHRAN266	2009-11-01 07:34	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL//NOFORN	Consulate Dhahran

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/06/22/116306/wikileaks-saudi-crackdown-on-shiites.html>

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VZCZCXRO5592
PP RUEHDE RUEHDIR
DE RUEHDH #0266/01 3050734
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P R 010734Z NOV 09
FM AMCONSUL DHAHRAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0307
INFO RUEHZM/GCC C COLLECTIVE
RUEHDH/AMCONSUL DHAHRAN 0403

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAHRAN 000266
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NOFORN  
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/ARP JOSHUA HARRIS AND JEREMY BERNDT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/31/2019  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [KREL](#) [PHUM](#) [SA](#)  
SUBJECT: EASTERN PROVINCE SHIA FRUSTRATED

REF: A. A. DHAHRAN 217  
[1](#)B. B. DHAHRAN 246  
[1](#)C. C. DHAHRAN 8

DHAHRAN 00000266 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Joseph Kenny, Dhahran Consul General, Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)  
SUMMARY

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[1](#)1. (C) Three prominent local Shia report that economic marginalization, combined with religious discrimination, are generating increased frustration in the Eastern Province (EP). This is compounded by a growing generation gap in the Shia community with an impatient younger generation inclined to protest their plight loudly and more openly than their circumspect elders. Symbolic but empty gestures by the SAG are doing little to placate popular anger. The perceived regional growth of Shia power is affecting the youth as well, crystallizing an attitude of "us" vs. "them." END SUMMARY.

The "Have Nots"

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[1](#)2. (C/NF) On 12 October, PolOffs and PDOff met with XXXXXXXXXXXX(protect), Vice-President of the XXXXXXXXXXXXX; XXXXXXXXXXXX(protect), XXXXXXXXXXXX(protect), the XXXXXXXXXXXXX. They described the ongoing sentiment in the Shia community as one of mounting frustration. The lack of economic opportunities and viable employment options for Shia, especially the youth, remains unchanged. Low university admission rates despite strong exam scores is also a point of contention. Although poverty itself is not rampant, economic marginalization adds a layer of frustration to the government-imposed religious discrimination of Shia in KSA.

Religious Discrimination

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[1](#)3. (C/NF) Religious discrimination could be the catalyst for radicalization. The closure of mosques, the prohibition of public display of Shia rituals and gatherings, and the denial of access to burial grounds and ceremony, are the most inflammatory issues in the Shia community. Continued discrimination, according to XXXXXXXXXXXX (protect), could lead to radicalism in the EP. XXXXXXXXXXXX recently reported (16 OCT) that after a Ramadan lull, Saudi authorities issued orders to close two Shia mosques in Dammam city after an uptick in mosque closures in the nearby city of Khobar (for more details on the Khobar mosque closing see ref A). Additionally, sectarian arrests and mosque closures in al-Ahsa have drawn the ire of Saudi Shia (see ref B for background on sectarian tension in al-Ahsa).

[1](#)4. (C/NF) The closure of religious centers affects those preparing for religious vocations, thus creating the need to travel abroad for advanced religious education. Qom, Iran is often mentioned as a top destination for religious education. In fact, XXXXXXXXXXXX (protect) recently returned from Qom

himself, where he traveled for religious study. Although he is quick to dismiss any affection for Ayatollah Khamenei, he mentioned being criticized on conservative Salafi websites for his time in Iran.

#### The Growing Divide

15. (C/NF) XXXXXXXXXXXX (protect) spoke at length on the growing generation gap in the Shia community between reticent older members and an impatient younger generation inclined to protest their plight loudly and more openly, with disregard for consequences such as imprisonment. He went so far as to say that their frustration is turning to hopelessness and exasperation, particularly as it pertains to a lack of religious freedom. Isa noted that such sentiments could be exploited by radicals.

16. (C/NF) Vocal religious leaders such as Sayed Mohammad Al-Nasser reflect Shia frustrations and thus command a growing following in the EP. Rasid.com recently (08 OCT) reported that Al-Nasser, the Friday Prayers' Imam in Khobar City, vowed to continue performing Shia prayers despite the Saudi authorities' ban. Al-Nasser nevertheless stated that Shia are currently waiting in anticipation for a royal decree by King Abdullah to resolve the issue on mosque closures. A high level Shia delegation from Khobar met King Abdullah on 19 July to brief him about the mosque closures. Despite promises to look into the matter, several well-informed contacts have not received any response on the issue.

#### Token Gestures

17. (C/NF) The SAG's consent to Shia involvement in local politics is not likely to mitigate current frustrations in the Shia community. Although the SAG has taken measured steps toward the inclusion of minorities in local politics, these steps have done little to placate the frustrations of the Shia community. XXXXXXXXXXXX (protect) emphasized that only an easing of religious discrimination will stifle the potential for radicalism. The Shia community's lack of freedom in exercising their spirituality is a major source of indignation. Hence, those who wish to espouse radical viewpoints may find an increasingly larger audience in the Shia community. Suffice it to say that the three Shia activists present at this meeting believe that religious freedom is more important than political inclusion for Shia of the EP.

#### REGIONAL SHIA RESURGENCE SPURS DEMANDS FOR RIGHTS

18. (C/NF) The perceived Shia "revival" elsewhere in the region is emboldening the Shia community. XXXXXXXXXXXX (protect) noted that international media outlets keep the Shia communities of the EP well informed. Many, especially the youth, are inspired by what they regard as Shia successes in Iraq and Lebanon and, hence are encouraged to demand greater rights. Hussein did not go so far as to suggest that Shias in KSA are receiving assistance from abroad.

#### COMMENT

19. (C/NF) The Shia of the EP have long been subject to religious discrimination and economic marginalization. At times, sentiments have erupted into open protest, resulting in bloodshed. It is important to note that such events occurred spontaneously, like in Medina (ref C), and without extensive coordination. END COMMENT.  
CG: JKENNY